

Buffalo-Niagara Partnership

August 10, 2005

I want to thank the Partnership for inviting me to be with you today. As you all know, we find ourselves in the midst of an economic crisis here in Western New York.

And though we may sometimes have different perspectives, we are all united in our commitment to rebuilding this community, and this economy.

It reminds me of a quote by the late Dr. Martin Luther King. ..." [We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.](#)
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Dr. King made that statement in a different time for a different purpose, but it has renewed meaning for us here today.

In the face of increasing globalization and fierce competition from cheap foreign labor, we truly sink or swim together, as a community and as a region.

From the steady decline of manufacturing jobs over recent years... and the ongoing problems of fiscal mismanagement, first at the city and now at the Erie county legislature... to the BRAC process which threatens to close the Niagara Falls Air base and take away even more local jobs...

... It's easy to feel like the deck has been stacked against us...like we are under attack from all sides.

Rebuilding in the face of such challenges is both difficult and frustrating. And those of you in this room, the business leaders of our community...you are on the front lines.

And as a result of your hard work, we are beginning to see a glimmer of hope on the horizon...Unemployment in the Buffalo Niagara metro area is down slightly from June of last year and private sector employment in the metro area has started to trend upward.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, despite fourteen hundred lost manufacturing jobs this year, the Buffalo-Niagara economy has managed a net gain in private sector jobs overall.

That triumph in the face of adversity is a credit to all of you here today, and your hard work on behalf of this community. And I am proud to join you in the fight to rebuild, reposition and reinvigorate this economy.

But as we begin to turn the corner, we still have many economic challenges to face together.

...like protecting the free flow of tourism and trade across our northern border and securing the funds needed to improving our public infrastructure, which creates local jobs and facilitates much needed economic development.

But, I am sure we all agree that no challenge is more urgent that the threat posed by the possible closure of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station. As you know, in May, the Pentagon recommended closing the Air Base and sending its planes to Arkansas and Maine.

The Air Base plays a key role in stabilizing the community's economy by providing much-needed employment and spurring economic development.

Closure would mean the loss of 1,000 local jobs and \$150 million in annual economic activity...Clearly, the stakes could not be higher.

That is why I have been working very closely with my delegation colleagues in both the House and Senate, with many of you here, and with the great folks over at the Niagara Military Affairs Council to ensure the air base remains open and fully operational.

We have a strong case to make to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission for why the Airbase should remain open and I believe we are real making progress in that fight.

The bottom line is the Pentagon screwed up.

They grossly exaggerated the amount of money they expect to save from closing the base and, perhaps most importantly, they ignored the strategic value of the Air base to homeland security operations. This has been an argument I've been making from the start: it doesn't make sense to close the only staging area for homeland defense in Western New York...especially since we are within a few miles of the northern border.

I have spent the past several months working to make our arguments to the 9 member, independent BRAC Commission.

I'm lucky that a member of the BRAC Commission, Jim Bilbray, is a former colleague of mine and a close friend.

Commissioner Bilbray has repeatedly indicated that the Commission has concerns about the Niagara recommendation and is taking a hard look at the Pentagon's justification for closure.

At my urging, Jim agreed to visit to the Air Base, and stay for the BRAC Regional hearing in Buffalo, which was held on June 27th.

Before the regional hearing, the Congressional delegation had an opportunity to sit down with the 4 Commissioners and make the case for keeping the base open. The meeting went extremely well.

All four Commissioners expressed concern about closing a base so close to the Northern Border and several echoed our concerns that the Air Force completely discarded the BRAC criteria in compiling their list.

And I believe they were all deeply impressed by the strong showing of community support that the Partnership generated for the hearing. It was truly outstanding work.

Since the regional hearing, I have been talking with Members of the Commission to keep the pressure on. I am cautiously optimistic that the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station is being strongly considered for removal from the BRAC list. However, I will continue to press the Commissioners up until they cast their decisive votes on August 23rd and 24th.

And while we continue the fight to protect our Air Base because of its importance to homeland security and the economic future of our region, I am also working to ease congestion at the region's four border crossings.

After all, rebuilding and revitalizing our economy means ensuring that the flow to tourism and trade across our northern border is not hindered in the face of increasing security concerns.

We cannot afford to choose between security and prosperity here in Western New York. We must have both.

The \$1.2 billion in trade that crosses our northern border each day supports about 5 million jobs in the U.S. alone. Nearly 60 percent of those goods move via the Ontario-U.S. border with the Buffalo Niagara Frontier accounting for \$60 billion in trade annually.

Border crossing delays already cost our U.S. business owners dearly- These delays cost the U.S. nearly half a million dollars every single hour...That comes out to a total loss of \$4.1 billion a year.

If congestion continues to disrupt the free flow of goods at these rates, U.S. employers will be forced to cut 17,000 jobs by 2020 and 90,000 jobs by 2030. These are big numbers will directly impact small local businesses.

For the future of our regional economy, congestion must be addressed, and it must be addressed in framework that supports our homeland security efforts. That's why I've been such a staunch advocate of expanding the NEXUS program.

Programs like NEXUS are a win for homeland security, and a win for our local economy.

That is why I offered an amendment to the Homeland Security authorization bill that will expand the NEXUS program and make it more effective and more user-friendly.

Part of this provision will create at least four new U.S. NEXUS enrollment centers and will establish one consistent NEXUS card for land and air travelers, which I understand is a priority for the Partnership.

I am pleased to announce that my amendment overwhelmingly passed in the House, and was endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

In the meantime we are making progress in our efforts to open a new enrollment center right here in Niagara Falls. And I will continue to push U.S. and Canadian customs officials until we finally cut the ribbon on this new facility.

I am also encouraged that the Peace Bridge recently opened their second on-demand NEXUS lane last month and was proud to do my part to help secure \$25 million for the Peace Bridge expansion project.

Likewise, I appreciate all that the Partnership has done to promote NEXUS and FAST to its members, and I am sure I coming to you for help again in the future as we continue to build this important program.

Tied in with expanding NEXUS is making sure that this program is included as an alternative to the State Department's suggested policy of requiring a passport for re-entry into the United States.

As I hope you know, I have been a staunch opponent of requiring individuals to present a passport to re-enter the U.S., and am pleased that President Bush joined me in questioning the wisdom of these requirements.

The problem is the State Department didn't take the economics of our security into account. That is why I have commissioned a GAO study on the topic, one that I will share with you once it is completed.

But in the meantime, rest assured that I have many irons in the fire to ensure that this proposal doesn't move forward.

If the federal government wants to truly safeguard our borders, then it has to start with properly protecting our border communities.

They call it a *national* border for a reason...Our region shouldn't have to shoulder severe costs for protecting the entire homeland...

It is outrageous for the federal government to pass those costs along to our local governments. It is outrageous that states like Wyoming and Alaska have received millions more per capita than New York State, which is on the frontlines of the war on terror.

The stakes are too high and risks are too great for pork barrel politics on this issue.

That is why I am leading the charge to revamp the way federal homeland security funding is allocated to States and local entities.

Congress will finalize new risk-based criteria for Homeland Security funding this fall. Please know that I will be doing everything in my power to assure that the money goes where the threats to our security are highest- right here in New York.

And just as we fight together to ensure that our community is protected, that our border remains open and that our air base stays where it belongs... so too must we fight to bring home the funding necessary to protect our transportation infrastructure.

And let me tell you, in Washington, when we fight for money, we fight like dogs over a bone. It certainly isn't pretty. But I can assure you that I know how to scrap with the best of 'em.

We waited eight long years for this transportation bill to come to the floor.

I am proud to announce that when the dust settled, I had secured over 20 million dollars for the 28th district in this one bill... including \$3.2 million dollars for the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, \$4.5 million for the Niagara Falls International Railway Station and \$1.6 million for the Michigan Avenue Preservation District on Buffalo's east side.

These projects will spur private investment and business development, generate community revitalization and create jobs. In fact, according to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation officials, this funding will have an economic impact equivalent to creating 950 new jobs right here in Western New York.

Stronger economic development, better long range transportation planning, increased employment opportunities.... This rising tide will truly lift all ships.

But as we continue the hard work of rebuilding and repositioning our economy in order to keep the tides of opportunity rising in this global age, we must also fight to protect that which we already have. I am committed to doing exactly that.

After 100 years of business, the Buffalo Color Company, the last domestic producer of indigo dye used to make blue jeans, is in the final throes of bankruptcy.

Buffalo Color is the victim, and it has already been adjudicated, of illegal Chinese dumping of indigo dye on the American market.

For 2 years, we have been asking for help from the Bush Administration to stop the Chinese companies from circumventing our trade laws by illegally shipping their cheap dye to the United States through Korea and Mexico.

I have tried repeatedly to personally discuss this case with Commerce Secretary Gutierrez, and have yet to even hear back from him.

I want the Partnership to understand that the unfair trade practices are going on because our own Commerce department will not stop them.

The Secretary has been so busy going to China to give away more jobs, he cannot even answer a letter.

We have called, we have written, we have issued press releases, but we cannot get the Bush Commerce Department to lift one finger to save an iconic American industry from annihilation at the hands of Chinese price dumping, which is already illegal.

The only remaining producer of the dye for blue jeans, a powerful American icon, will soon be liquidated due to illegal price dumping, and more local jobs will vanish.

I hope the sad irony of this is not going to be lost on anybody here today, because Buffalo Color should be able to count on its Federal Government to provide protection from unfair trade practices, as should all American companies.

I am not willing to accept what is happening and I hope you won't either.

This is another one of those issues that affects all of us here locally- regardless of partisan affiliation.

I believe this is about our economic survival as a community.

As we march bravely into the future, as we continue to diversify our economy and reposition ourselves for prosperity in a global world- we cannot forget who we are and where we have come from.

We cannot build a bridge to a brighter economic future without a strong commitment to strengthening our foundations ...that is why taking the time and effort to renew our economic resources is good for our environment and our community.

And as the Partnership clearly recognizes, it is also good business.

This morning I convened a regional forum on brownfields redevelopment with the economic development offices of Erie and Niagara County, and the Cities of Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lockport, and North Tonawanda. As you probably know, these municipalities have all teamed up to start the Niagara Strategic Brownfields Waterfront Plan.

The objective of this plan is to link brownfields redevelopment to the economic, social, and ecological restoration along the region's waterfront.

I asked the national expert on brownfields remediation and redevelopment, Charlie Bartsch of the Northeast-Midwest Institute, to make a presentation on how other communities have successfully redeveloped their brownfields, and how best to overcome the natural challenges of several different entities working together to achieve a common goal.

Like so many of the issues we are facing as a community, success will require a Partnership that truly reaches beyond these doors here today.

As the world gets smaller and faster and more complex, as globalization increases the competition for skilled labor and further jeopardizes the traditional economic base of this region, we can no longer afford the stale luxury of partisanship to divide us on the local economic issues which face this community.

We must transcend the old ways. We have already seen a new spirit of determination and cooperation spring into action here in the Buffalo-Niagara community...Under the threat of our base being taken and our borders being closed we have truly come together as partners...and I believe the results will be impressive.

I fully recognize that we cannot expect the business community alone to rebuild, reposition and reinvigorate our economy and our community. We all have an important role to play and we are all party to the same fate. That is why I am standing here with you today, ready to fulfill my responsibility. And that is why I will be standing by you tomorrow and long into the future.